A

SHORT LETTER

TO

A NOBLE LORD,

ON

THE PRESENT STATE OF LUNATIC ASYLUMS IN GREAT BRITAIN.

The clanking of chains, the wildness of their cries, and the imprecations which some of them uttered, formed a scene inexpressibly shocking.

MAN OF FEELING.

EDINBURGH:

PRINTED BY A. NEILL & CO.

1806.

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The Author of the following short Letter, had his attention called to the subject by an amiable individual, about eight months ago. He was much shocked at the result of his first inquiries; but was silent, till, after visiting several Asylums both in England and Scotland, he was but too well convinced the evils he has hinted at were general. He then addressed himself to a Noble Lord, high in his Majesty's Councils, of whose feeling heart he had heard much, and of whom he has every reason to believe report speaks true: He suggested to his Lordship several methods by which a reform might be brought about. His Lordship candidly acknowledged the justness of his remarks; but acknowledgment and active exertions are different things. He has therefore taken the present method of again addressing his Lordship.

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A

SHORT

LETTER, &c.

My Lord,

Our private correspondence has assured me, that we are of the same opinion with respect to the present state of the *Lunatic Asylums* in Great Britain; and when convinced that this state is most wretched, is it not our duty to do all in our power to bring about an amendment? This, I am well aware, cannot be accomplished by one individual, however

however exalted his station; and anxious that the eyes of a generous people may be directed to the miserable condition of the unhappy maniac in this country, I have presumed to address your Lordship publicly on the subject.

THE number of ASYLUMS for the reception of the INSANE in Britain, is no doubt considerable; and many of those established by professional individuals, are well conducted, and are an honour to the country: but though I admit this, it is a fact that requires little illustration, that the number of those institutions of a *public nature*, is by far too limited. They are chiefly confined to the neighbourhood of the metropolis. Few indeed are to be found throughout the country; and even those *few*, whether established by private munificence or public benevolence, are in general so crowded, and kept

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in such a state, that they are rather a disgrace than a blessing to society.

The friends of an unhappy individual, whose rank or fortune would enable him to benefit the institution, where, under the Almighty, reason was restored to him, have neither the encouragement nor the confidence to place him in any of our Public Asylums; and the funds of these institutions are in general so small, that the friendless and destitute cannot be received.

This, my Lord, is a great evil, and calls aloud to be remedied. Scarce can we enter a village, however small, but some wretched creature is seen wandering in a state too shocking to relate; and whatever may have been the original cause of that madness, I am certain, in many cases, *neglect*, *misery* and *want*, have continued and confirmed it:

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But this is not all; Are we convinced, that the insane, when they are received into our present Asylums, shall be treated as they ought to be? No, my Lord, if we take a minute survey of any one of these habitations, we shall, I am afraid, have many a dreadful tale to tell.

THE prying eye of kind humanity seldom daring to enter those abodes of woe, and the physician too often considering medicine as of no avail, the KEEPER is entrusted with the sole management of the unhappy sufferer. How few keepers are worthy of such a charge. Sullen, unfeeling and cruel is the greater part of those men placed in such situations, who use their fellow man worse than they would the wild animal of the forest; while even the more delicate frame of the softer sex, (under their government), meets not with a less brutal treatment. This,

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my Lord, is most frequently the case, even in the best-regulated institutions.

HAVING nothing to fear from his superior, and knowing his conduct shall never be called in question, is there not also some reason to fear that the cruel treatment of the keeper is frequently the cause of that derangement becoming permanent, which, if properly managed, would have been only temporary?

THIS, we have every reason to belive, is too much the truth; for instead of watching every dawn of returning reason,—instead of fawning every spark of light in the tender and benighted mind, his conduct is only guided by caprice, if not worse; and the lash is equally lavished on all.

WITH what horror must every feeling mind turn from such reflections. I am sure there

there is not a Briton but will exclaim, Does such misery exist in my country? Yes, my Lord, were I to lead him to the dungeon door of the maniac, and let him behold a being possessed of equal feeling with himself, chained naked in his cell, with the damp earth for his bed, and the cold stones for his pillow: No tender friend to counsel him in the short intervals of reason and reflection, —to direct his deranged ideas, and calm his troubled soul; secluded, too, from the light of heaven, and the delights of nature, without any object of contemplation, but the gloom of his dark dwelling, and the dreaded thong of his hated keeper:—How must he feel, to see such misery, and know that this, and even worse than this, does in reality exist.

Whoever considers this, my Lord, which is no strained picture, must be convinced it

is full time that something should be done to better the present condition of the insane. In such a place as I have described, (and more than once witnessed), we can never expect that reason shall return. It may serve for a prison during a short and miserable existence; but it is undoubtedly more fitted to beget madness than to favour a recovery.

I SPEAK not of those Private Asylums, kept by professional men, for their own interest, and by which, generally speaking, *they* in no long time make rich. These, I am aware, are only inhabited by the opulent, and their character becomes security, in some measure, for their proper attention. The object of the present Letter is to point out to your Lordship, and the Public, *some* of those evils which do exist with regard to those Asylums which are considered *public*,

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for the reception of Lunatics; and to call upon a Generous Nation to take some measures for having *these evils* done away.

My Lord, the Mad-house, I am afraid, has hitherto been considered a place of confinement for the Lunatic, rather than a place of recovery; but even granting this, why has the internal management been so little regarded, and the medical department so very much neglected?

The British Nation can boast of the most noble institutions of almost every kind, for the relief and comfort of the various descriptions of the people, whether in sickness or health; but the condition of the insane has been most unaccountably overlooked.

The small number of *institutions* erected by the Public, that exist at present, are unworthy

worthy of the name. Those connected with Infirmaries are in many respects better; but of such there are few, and the number of patients they can receive is very limited; while the still smaller number which private munificence has established, only serves to show the great want of such Asylums throughout the nation.

I HAVE already stated, my Lord, that it is not in the power of one individual to bring about this so much wanted reform; it must be done by the Legislature; and were it properly brought forward, it is a task by no means difficult. An act should be passed, to compel, (and I am sure little compulsion would be necessary), the different counties to build and to support an Asylum for the reception of the insane of that county; and even in counties not populous, two or more might be united. These should be

built

built, supported, and governed, according to fixed regulations laid down in the act. The regulations might be framed from the opinions of the different Royal Colleges of Physicians, according to the wisdom of the British Parliament.

Active and intelligent physicians only should be appointed to these Asylums; and their conduct, with regard to attention, &c. should be equally under the cognizance of an inspector. I think they should be obliged to keep journals of all cases that come under their care, and that these should be transmitted regularly to a Medical Board at London. This would not only tend to improve the healing art, but be a source of general comfort and confidence, and a sure pledge to the public, that every proper attention was paid to the unhappy individuals of whatever rank or condition.

All Asylums, whether public or private, as well those already established, as those which it shall be found necessary to establish, should be under the same regulations; and the Chief Magistrate of the Burgh or County where such Asylum was situated, should be charged with seeing the law fulfilled. For this purpose, he might be obliged to visit the Asylum a certain number of times in a given period, but at irregular intervals, so as to report the state thereof to some higher power. This, I am convinced, would secure what is wanted; and it is what the Legislature have the power of accomplishing without much trouble.

Would some feeling *One*, whose wealth enabled him, travel through the various parts of the British Empire, and visit the habitation of the madman in every place, a true picture of his journey would be sufficient to

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rouse the nation to what I have suggested, as I know well my remarks would be dreadfully confirmed. Such a journey I have often meditated; but the means of accomplishing it I am afraid shall never be in my power. I must therefore content myself with contributing this mite. It may perhaps stir up some advocate more able to plead their cause, and tend to keep alive in your Lordship's mind what was formerly suggested.

I have the honour to be,

&c. &c. &c.

MEDICUS.